MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

MEMORANDUM

To: Task Force on Student Social Life

cc. Karl Lindholm, Dean of Students

Frank Kelley, Director of Residential Life

From: Task Force on Composition of the Student Body

Date: April 24, 1989

Subject: SPECIAL-INTEREST HOUSING AND DIVERSITY

It appears to us that our two groups have some common interests, albeit from different perspectives. The faculty has, in effect, asked the College to consider moving toward more special-interest housing. Although we don't reject that concept out of hand, we do have concerns about how it would be done and how this change may relate to our efforts to benefit from the expanding diversity in the student community.

Our Task Force believes that any special-interest housing must be very carefully conceived and implemented. It should not diminish the level and frequency of contact among diverse groups of students in the residential setting. Residential composition of special-interest houses should be determined to invite male and female members, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity, and diversity of outside interests. For example, we are comfortable with having a Spanish house whose membership is open to all students who can speak Spanish. We are not comfortable with having a house open only to members of the choir or to students who play on a rugby team. Similarly, we would not favor the creation of a house open only to members of the Black Student Union. In sum, "special interest" should be defined in terms of academic interests.

Whether students live in an area for one year or several, it is especially important that the membership reflect the racial/ethnic/ religious diversity, the socio-economic diversity, and the diversity

of interests and talents of our student body. We have serious concerns about "block draws" in general, and especially about recent suggestions that there should be increased use of block draws in assigning housing. We are not referring to students who apply together to live in doubles or triples but rather to large groups of students who are able to occupy an entire floor or a housing unit. We note, parenthetically, the great loss of flexibility in housing that accompanies any system of large block draws; this issue can best be explained by Frank Kelley and Theresa O'Loughlin.

Middlebury College is now strengthening its efforts at preparing students to function in the increasingly diverse nation of the twenty-first century. We are also becoming more and more international in our perspectives. Our Task Force is concerned that special-interest housing could, inadvertently, create barriers to these important goals. All of our students must benefit from the expanding diversity of our community, not only in the classroom setting, but also in residential and social settings.

We cannot propose specific policies that will take these goals into account; that is a job for you and many others. We do ask that you consider carefully our concerns. We would be happy to have a joint meeting of our two groups to discuss these matters.

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Marylin Belle, 1989
Rick Dalton, Director of Enrollment Planning, Admissions
Robert Donaghey, Director, Financial Aid
Caroline Donnan, Assistant Director & Coordinator of Admissions Outreach
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Judith Liskin-Gasparro, Special Assistant to Director of the Language Schools
Fred Neuberger, Dean of Admissions
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